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The Web of Life

Had some strange suspension of time and space allowed an Iowan to fall asleep in 1851 and awaken one hundred years later, he would have found himself in a new and strange world. This Hawkeye Rip Van Winkle would have been overcome by the scientific progress which had remade the America of another century. In his day there had been no telephones, no electric lights, no automobiles, no motion pictures. The Iowa of 1851 numbered 192,214 souls, but the western half of the state was virtually unsettled. The telegraph had reached the state only three years earlier, and the iron horse had not yet linked the Atlantic with the Mississippi at Davenport. In 1851 Iowa's newspaper editors were gravely debating over whether the plank road or the railroad was the coming thing. In that same year the Sioux treaty erased the last Indian claims to the soil of Iowa.

To startle this returned Iowan, 1951 presented a scene of immense contrasts. Sleek silver streamliners carried passengers and freight over 8,576 miles of railroad track. Concrete and asphalt had triumphed over wooden planks, and nearly six thousand miles of hard-surfaced roads were serving Iowa motorists. Fifty radio stations, two tele-

vision outlets — augmented by stations at Rock Island and Omaha — and 835,000 telephones provided Iowans with entertainment and communication.

Of course, this new society had problems which had not troubled the 1851 Iowan. Neighbors could no longer pitch in to help build a homestead in a few day's time. Neither Davenport nor Dubuque had found traffic officers necessary in 1851. Radio commercials posed no problem, and there were no party telephone lines open to inquisitive ears when Stephen Hempstead was governor.

In both 1851 and 1951 it seemed that Iowa was about to turn the corner. The question was: What was around that corner? Jules Verne was twenty-three in 1851, and had not yet written his famous work of fiction, *From the Earth to the Moon*. In 1951, on the other hand, a trip to the moon no longer seemed like a laughing matter, particularly since men were already traveling with the speed of sound.

The year had opened with many Iowans dividing their attention between the annual New Year's football bowl games and the latest reports from faraway Korea, where an enemy offensive was under way. The war in Asia was more than six months old, and thousands of Iowans were personally interested, what with sons, husbands, and sweethearts on the fighting lines.

The first week in January saw recruiting offices

in Iowa packed with crowds of young men volunteering for military service. By mid-year over 160 Iowans had died in the rice paddies and on the hillsides of Korea. Sergeant First Class Junior D. Edwards of Indianola was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his single-handed attack on an enemy gun position.

When the truce talks gave the United Nations troops a breathing spell, many an anxious Iowa mother awaited word from the enemy prison stockades. Finally, news came that "at least 55 missing Iowa servicemen are alive" in North Korean camps. By the year's end hopes for an armistice remained. Through the armed forces rotation plan hundreds of battle-weary Iowans realized the soldier's dream of "being home for Christmas."

Even when the Korean war was not in the headlines, there was plenty of news to remind Iowans they were living in a time of crisis. Thus, a spring call of reservists and National Guardsmen took 2,000 Iowans back into uniform. The 194th Field Artillery battalion, made up of men from Humboldt, Algona, Spencer, Estherville, and Mapleton, received orders to sail for Bremerhaven, Germany. Major General Hanford MacNider of Mason City retired as commanding general of the 103rd National Guard division to end a long career as a citizen-soldier which dated back to Mexican border campaigns. The red-faced crew of a nineteen-ton tank which fell through a bridge

near Iowa City, after National Guard maneuvers in the area, learned the bridge was built to withstand a nine-ton load. When the *USS Iowa*, the world's largest battleship, was recommissioned and sent to Hawaii on a shakedown cruise, fourteen prominent Iowans went along as part of the "crew."

There were indirect repercussions from the Korean battlefield which made Iowa news in 1951. After General Douglas MacArthur was recalled as supreme commander, Iowa's congressional delegation divided on the incident on party lines. When Sergeant First Class John Rice, a Korean casualty, was denied burial in a Sioux City cemetery because he was a Winnebago Indian (and not a Caucasian), President Truman promptly arranged for his burial with full military honors in the Arlington National Military Cemetery. Sioux City later held its own ceremonies honoring Rice, and the cemetery's officials explained the whole affair was "an unfortunate mistake."

Despite the war Iowa kept its sense of humor in 1951. Among the many items which came before the 54th General Assembly was a Des Moines youngster's request that the legislature legalize the sale of caps for toy pistols. A sympathetic lawmaker fashioned the necessary bill, but it was defeated by a 52-49 vote. A survey of the estate left by a Fairfield widow disclosed the accumulation of over five hundred dresses, ninety-six pairs

of shoes, "mounds of sheets and blankets," and even an unopened package of children's stockings which the childless woman had purchased in 1919. Charges of distributing obscene literature against a Dubuque news dealer were dropped after an investigation disclosed that books by John Steinbeck, W. Somerset Maugham, and a book of old masters' paintings with works by Titian and Velasquez had been designated "questionable."

Even among the sordid accounts of crime, a trace of humor occasionally appeared. A large grocery chain finally sued a young bandit for \$1,207 taken from one of their stores in a holdup, after other attempts to regain the captured man's cache had failed. A Des Moines steamfitter used an 1869 model "collector's item" gun in a holdup which netted him fifty cents. The presiding judge meted out a twenty-five year sentence for this act. A Sioux City attorney announced he was defending a man charged with forgery on the ground that his client did not know how to write. Definitely on the lighter side was the \$2.00 paid by the Charles City mayor who fined himself for running a red light. A Des Moines man was arrested and charged with driving a horse and buggy while intoxicated.

While sociologists puzzled over the motives for crimes, Iowa law enforcement officials battled a car theft ring which operated across state lines, victimizing innocent purchasers. The final page

in the tragic story of Dr. Robert C. Rutledge, Jr., was written when the young doctor took his own life near Houston, Texas, after the Iowa Supreme Court ordered him to begin serving a seventy-year sentence for a Cedar Rapids murder. Sheriff George Christian reported new rumors were circulating about the unsolved 1912 Villisca murders.

Bank robbers took almost identical sums (around \$11,000) from vaults in Minburn and Epworth, but fast work by police gave them little opportunity to spend their loot. Eighty-eight Iowans were charged by state officials with accepting unemployment checks while they were working at regular jobs, and told to return the money or face criminal charges. The jilted boy friend of an attractive Des Moines girl stabbed his former sweetheart while she walked to a cathedral communion rail. She recovered, and he was found to be insane. At Jewell, a fourteen-year-old boy shot and killed his father after they had an argument over raking leaves in their yard.

The young and the old also helped make news in 1951. Three-year-old Nancy Myrton of Aurora received national publicity when it was learned that she was an accomplished seamstress. Five-year-old Larry Joe Rathje, a cancer victim, tugged at Iowa's heartstrings when he asked for a chance to meet a genuine cowboy. A visiting rodeo sent one of its most eligible cowhands to call on Larry Joe. W. O. Dowden, a ninety-five-year-old resi-

dent of Spirit Lake, took the driver's license examination and read the visual test without glasses. Mrs. Annie Hensey, seventy-five years young, the oldest pilot at the Boone airport dedication, flew from her home at Jefferson to attend the dedication breakfast. New Providence got a new citizen when Matrena Ignatenkwa, a ninety-nine-year-old displaced person from Russia, joined the community. A Council Bluffs couple, divorced for 46 years, decided to mend their broken marriage after a chance meeting on the street.

The political scene was quiet after the General Assembly closed shop, but visiting political dignitaries reminded voters a presidential election was only a year away. Senator Robert A. Taft, an announced candidate for the Republican nomination, made several visits to Iowa for speaking engagements. Governor Beardsley early declared himself in favor of General Dwight D. Eisenhower as the GOP standard-bearer in 1952. Henry Wallace, the Progressive party nominee in 1948, returned to the state to attend a funeral but dodged political questions.

Former president Herbert Hoover sent his hometown telegraphic congratulations when West Branch celebrated its centennial. A month later he visited the State Fair at Des Moines to accept the first "Iowa Award" from the state for his contributions to the nation.

Women helped make the news in Iowa during

1951. Mrs. E. T. Hubbard of Iowa City was named Iowa's "Mother of the Year." Mrs. Florence Lynch, the national Democratic committee-woman for Iowa from Le Mars, declared the Reconstruction Finance Corporation loan to a firm which she served as vice-president was a "normal business transaction." In the women's own special department — beauty — Miss Nancy Norman of Shenandoah was chosen "Miss Iowa of 1951," and Mrs. Elaine Evans of Davenport won the "Mrs. Iowa" title.

Accidents plagued Iowans in their homes, on the highways, and at their jobs in 1951. Fifteen persons were killed on March 2 when an airliner plunged into a cornfield near Sioux City during a snowstorm. It was the first fatal crash of a commercial airliner in Iowa. Traffic deaths accounted for 625 lives, the highest in Iowa history. Three crewmen died in a train wreck at Woodbine, but an even greater disaster was averted near Panama when forty-five boxcars, including five loaded with 16-inch naval ammunition, left the rails. Death often marred holiday outings: six members of the Postel family from Waterloo were drowned when their car fell into the Des Moines River. Drama and tragedy were entwined in the successful rescue of a coal miner trapped in a shaft near Plano. A doctor being lowered to aid in the rescue was critically injured when the cable holding the elevator snapped.

Although deaths by accident were high, public health officials reported heart disease and cancer were the worst killers in Iowa during 1951. Over 26,000 deaths occurred, 9,693 from heart disease, and 4,106 from cancer. Accidents took 1,703 lives. Health officials were cheered by the fact that tuberculosis was the only contagious disease among the twelve main causes of death, ranking twelfth on the list with 175 victims.

Infantile paralysis or "polio," which has caused growing anxiety in recent years among parents, claimed 462 victims in 1951, but the number of fatalities was low. Health officials said the 1951 total of victims could be considered "fairly light." Medical history was made in Des Moines when Mrs. Fred Thomas' heart stopped beating for two minutes during an operation. A fast-thinking doctor revived Mrs. Thomas by massaging her heart muscles with his fingers. The decline in Iowa's maternal mortality rate since 1930 continued, with only 5.7 deaths per 10,000 births in 1951.

Among the notable Iowans who died during 1951 were T. Henry Foster, meat packing executive; Dr. Charles Reuben Keyes, famous Cornell College educator and archaeologist; Garrett Wyckoff, Grinnell College professor and sociologist; Stephen W. Stookey, geology professor at Coe College; Dr. W. H. Stevenson, world renowned agriculturist and professor emeritus at Iowa State College; Merrill Bernard, international

authority on climatology and hydrology; Bishop George Allen Beecher, an Episcopalian churchman for fifty-one years; F. W. Fitch, founder of the famous hair tonic firm at Des Moines; Ellison Orr, authority on Iowa's Indian mounds and relics; James Norman Hall, World War I aviator and author; William E. Cotton, internationally known veterinarian and teacher; Mount Pleasant-born Samuel M. Shortridge, former United States senator from California; John W. Rath, co-founder of the packing firm that bears his name; and Frank C. Pellett, naturalist and apiarist.

Iowans, who have been eagerly volunteering for various services ever since the Mexican War, kept up this habit in 1951. United States Secretary of Commerce Charles Sawyer paid tribute to 10,000 volunteer weather observers in Iowa, including W. S. Slagle of Alton and Mrs. M. T. Disney of Le Claire, both with over fifty years service. When a mock atomic bomb was "dropped" on Cedar Rapids, 309 private airplanes, probably the largest all-civilian airlift in history, brought 110,000 pounds of simulated supplies into the city to help emphasize the need for an alert civil defense setup in Iowa. Augmenting volunteer services was the radar defense screen erected in cornfields as part of the national air defense program. The screens were reported to be 150 miles apart and operating on a 24-hour schedule.

For a while it appeared likely that Iowa's first

contact with white men dated from the fourteenth century. An iron axhead found near Iowa Falls was first thought to have been a weapon brought to America by Norsemen long before 1492. A careful examination of the axhead by Prof. R. W. Breckenridge of Iowa State College convinced him of its authenticity. Just when the discovery portended a revision of Iowa's history books, more iron axes turned up, all with the same shape and design. Then many old-timers agreed they had seen the "weapon" used as plug tobacco cutters for a brand — "Battle Axe" — which had been popular in Iowa many years ago.

On the national sports scene, Iowa-born Bob Feller signed his Cleveland Indian's baseball contract for a reported \$50,000. To earn the money, he posted a 22-8 pitching record, one of the best in the major leagues, and became the first modern pitcher to hurl his third no-hit game when he bested Detroit, 2-1. Sioux City won the Western League playoffs by defeating Denver, while Cedar Rapids lost the Three-I League finals to Quincy. Professional golfdom invaded Iowa on two occasions. Marty Furgol of Chicago won the Western Open at Davenport. A month later, Buck White of Greenwood, Mississippi, won \$2,400 and the Sioux City Open title. Mrs. Leo Johnstone of Mason City won the women's state golf championship. Anglers cheered when an agreement between Iowa and Illinois was signed in June which

allowed fishermen licensed by either state to enjoy equal privileges on the Mississippi "so far as flowing water is concerned."

At the year's end, Iowans could soberly reflect that another twelve months of steady gains had passed. Assuredly, there was more money in the bank accounts, more luxuries available to the people, and splendid cities of stone and steel now stood where sod-houses and log cabins were built a hundred years ago. Balanced against these advances was the fact that most Iowans were in an uneasy, restless state of mind.

It was ever thus. Prior to the Civil War countless pioneers forsook the ease and comparative certainty of their eastern homes and migrated to Iowa. However, security and stability which pioneers had envisioned seemed to many by 1951 like an unattainable goal for a dynamic but uncertain society. Indeed, some believed there was no bedrock of confidence in a progressively greater civilization which loomed just ahead. But if many an Iowan's brow was furrowed in 1951, so were his hillsides, and the precious soil of Iowa still held the key to her future.

ROBERT RUTLAND